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ABSTRACT

In response to the restructuring of a school's literacy program, a study was designed to address three research question: (1) What levels of concerns are raised by teachers in the areas of "self," "task," and "impact"? (2) What responses do these concerns elicit from university researchers and other participants? and (3) What changes occurred among participants during their involvement in the initial phase of this project? Data sources included: audio tapes of weekly inservices involving 2 university researchers, 23 teachers, and the school principal; teacher journals; participant responses to questionnaires; field notes of classroom observations; and collaborative interactions with teachers. Findings from the initial phase of the study are reported through three case studies. They represent change that occurred in teachers who had been initially perceived as traditional, average and expert regarding whole language literacy instruction. In their journals, essays, concern surveys, and conversations, the voices of teachers, as represented by Doris, Jackie, and Jean, confirmed the efficacy of the following change factors: change is a process, not an event; change is a highly personal experience; change involves developmental growth; and change is best understood as it directly affects classroom practice, students and preparation time. (One figure showing stages of concern data is included.) (MG)

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Whole Language Collaboration Project: Three Case Studies to Represent Change

The purpose of this paper is to describe the impact of the initial phase of a long-term inservice program aimed at restructuring one elementary school's literacy program. It will focus on observed changes that occurred within three teachers, a representative sample of all participants, who became active participants in staff development sessions designed around effective change principles.

Fannin Elementary School in Grand Prairie, Texas, is a multi-ethnic, urban elementary school situated in a neighborhood changing from "lower middle" socioeconomic status to "low" socioeconomic status. At least half of the population is non-English speaking and comprised of first generation immigrants predominantly from areas of Latin America and Mexico. Nearly 70% of the children enrolled in the school qualify for free or reduced lunch. A majority of the students in this school are "at risk".

Urban schools are increasingly faced with problems of literacy instruction. During the past two years, staff members have become aware of the inadequacy of traditional skill-based approaches to reading instruction for meeting the needs of students at Fannin. For this reason, the principal and a majority of school personnel were eager to explore proactive measures for providing effective literacy instruction to this "at-risk" population. Staff members at Fannin were in agreement: Adopting a whole language philosophy toward literacy instruction, schoolwide, held promise for eventual success.

At the principal's request, two university researchers visited Fannin to discuss options for addressing staff concerns regarding literacy instruction. As a result of this consultation, the "Whole Language Collaboration Project" was established to affect educational change. In December, 1989, this study of learning, language, teaching and curriculum, was initiated at Fannin Elementary School.

Methods and Procedures

This study was designed to address three research questions: (a) What levels of concerns are raised by teachers in the areas of "Self," "Task" and "Impact?" (b) What responses do these concerns elicit from university researchers and other participants? and; (c) What changes occurred among participants during their involvement in the initial phase of this project? Data sources included audio tapes of weekly inservices, teacher journals, participant responses to questionnaires, field notes of classroom observations and collaborative interactions with teachers.

From December 13, 1989 through May 3, 1990, fourteen forty-five to sixty minute inservices were conducted with researchers, twenty-three teachers and the school principal for the following purposes: (a) to identify what teachers and administrators did at that time to promote literacy in their school; (b) to identify what, according to the research, whole language teachers do to promote literacy among students; (c) to identify aspects of whole language literacy instruction to explore and put into practice in

this school; (d) to provide in-depth study/discussion groups to strengthen each member's knowledge of the aspects of whole language, so that individual, grade level and whole school goals could be set; and (e) to establish collegial relations between university, district and school personnel. Teacher/staff participation was voluntary throughout the entire project. In addition to weekly inservice sessions, the university researchers spent two half-days per week observing in classrooms to strengthen relations and to gain a true picture of what went on in each teacher's classroom, in order that a better understanding of the educational community as a whole could be obtained.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978) was employed to develop theory about how collaborative efforts between university and school researchers affected change. Key points and recurring events were used to develop categories that described change in the participants. Additional incidents or evidences of these categories were searched for and described. The information and relationships obtained from the categories were used to develop theory about the change factors involved in this collaborative project. Findings are reported through three case studies. They represent change that occurred in teachers initially perceived as traditional, average and expert regarding whole language literacy instruction.

Portrait of Doris: Traditional

Doris, an older woman, might be considered one of the more

traditional teachers at Fannin Elementary. On their first visit to her second grade classroom, university researchers noticed an abundance of word cards around the room. They were grouped according to beginning sounds. The students were reading along in their basal readers with Doris. She stopped periodically and students provided missing words. One child was observed completing a worksheet during the group reading. Doris wandered around the room during this time with her teacher's manual in her hand. She asked two students to demonstrate the word "waddling" from the story. There were many commercially-produced charts on the walls of the room, i.e. Bloom's Taxonomy. There was some work produced by students on one bulletin board which consisted of dittoes of bears that students had colored. There was no print on these dittoes.

Portrait of Jackie: Average

Jackie is a teacher familiar with whole language, "having learned about it in college years before." However, Jackie has never fully implemented what she believes to be a whole language approach because of being "swallowed up by the enormous task of teaching itself." Early observations of Jackie during inservice sessions suggested she was a quiet, almost "sleepy" teacher who appeared, in a sense, to be very average. During their initial visit to Jackie's classroom, university researchers expected to confirm their early impressions. They noted that the walls were bereft of any student work, some library books were visible, there was a reading corner, and some areas were cluttered with

phone books and reference books. It appeared that a direct approach to instruction was conducted in a disorganized manner. However, as more time was spent in this classroom, it was discovered that initial impressions were inconsistent with what was actually observed. The room was filled with activity as students, in varying stages of activities, worked individually, in pairs or small groups. Jackie exhibited a quiet manner moving around the room stopping to talk to students; checking on their progress.

Portrait of Jean: Expert

Last year, Jean was a first-year second grade, bilingual teacher. She had been trained solely in whole language literacy instruction. When she began the year at Fannin, she had no idea how to read a basal reader teacher's manual. Samples of published children's writing covered the walls both inside and outside her classroom. Discussion groups, paired reading of big books, an area designated for the author's chair, and numerous experience story charts were among indicators of a child-centered, literacy-rich classroom. During the university researchers' first visit to her classroom, Jean alternated among reading aloud, conferencing with individual students or small groups and facilitating oral discussion related to literature currently under study. Within this noisy classroom, children were involved in purposeful language activities.

Findings

Researchers have identified factors associated with change

in school programs (Oakes, Hare & Sirotnik, 1986; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall, 1987; Henke, 1988). The university researchers were aware of these factors, designed inservices and conducted individual and small group conferences that modeled these principles. In their journals, essays, concern surveys, and conversations, the voices of teachers, as represented by Doris, Jackie and Jean, confirmed the efficacy of the following change factors.

Change is a process, not an event.

Those who do not understand the complexities of change tend to equate it with handing over a new program, an event. Instead, change must be viewed as a process occurring over time, usually a period of several years. Initially, teachers involved in the "Whole Language Collaboration Project" expected to become whole language teachers in a short period of time. The university researchers consistently emphasized that lasting change occurs gradually. The following comments represent teachers' evolving perceptions of what change involves:

> "It was comforting to Doris when she realized whole language as a way of teaching could not, would not happen overnight. It is a step-by-step process to be accomplished over a long period of time as the teacher is comfortable and ready for change." (Doris, 8-90)
>
> "I was thinking about how important it is to keep learning and restructuring what we need to know and what we already know." (Jackie, 3-90)

"At the beginning of the project the teachers were a little hostile...It took time and patience for everyone to become comfortable with the 'whole idea'. The communication level increased between teachers and administrators at Fannin because they're interested in trying something new...There was lots of sharing and exchange of ideas. Within months Fannin started to change slowly." (Jean, 8-90)

Change is a highly personal experience.

Individuals altering their instructional philosophies differ in their reactions to the change process. University researchers routinely documented each participant's concerns. Consequently, ongoing interactions could better support individual development. The comments of Doris, Jackie and Jean represent the variety of needs expressed by the Fannin staff.

"I am not yet comfortable with really 'knowing what and the how of Whole language'. Even yet I wonder if I am doing it correctly. I'm learning there is no really right or wrong way. I'm wondering if the writing is not really the most important part of whole language. I hesitate because I wonder if they (students) will get as much vocabulary from their own experiences/imaginations that they would get from the basal. Spelling is another area of concern. Our basal in spelling is grouped according to like letter groups. How much time would it take to prepare our own spelling

lists? The tremendous time it takes to prepare and implement something from scratch makes me fearful." (Doris, 3-90)

"Jackie goes into this school year feeling both excited and overwhelmed with the enormity of her expectations she has for herself. She knows that with time, in the setting and help she has, that whole language teaching will be possible." (Jackie, 8-90)

"Ever since we started the program or inservice (Whole Language Collaboration Project), I felt I wasn't alone anymore. Sometimes I still feel isolated because I can't share my feelings and ideas like I want. For the past two months I have felt so more confident about Language Experience and Whole Language about what I'm doing." (Jean, 3-90)

Change involves developmental growth.

Individuals involved in change programs exhibit different feelings, skills and attitudes toward the innovation as they become better acquainted with the new information. In their Stages of Concern Survey, Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall (1987) have provided a means for documenting the evolving concerns of participants in change programs. Results of this survey yield a profile which illustrates concerns in three major areas: Self, Task and Impact.

According to Hord et al. (1987), "When a change effort is in its early stages, teachers are very likely to have "self-

concerns". They will want to know more about the innovation [whole language], what it is and how it is similar to and different from what they are already doing" (p. 31). Such concerns dictate the need to "... help teachers see how the innovation relates to their current practices, both in regard to similarities and differences" (p. 44).

"Task" concerns tend to become more intense as participants begin to implement the innovation and during its early use. Examples of such concerns include use of time, classroom management and instructional materials. When participants become comfortable with an innovation, concerns shift to "impact" on students, relations with colleagues and administration, and improving the effectiveness of the program.

The Stages of Concern Survey was administered to the participants in this study on three separate occasions: January, March and August. Survey profiles of Doris, Jackie and Jean are illustrated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Doris' profile is representative of a participant, interested in changing theory and practice, yet lacking a knowledge base regarding whole language literacy instruction. "self" and "task" concerns were consistently high at each administration of the survey. In contrast, "impact" concerns were much lower. These results could be expected when a

traditional teacher, such as Doris, is faced with a fundamental shift in pedagogy.

Jackie's profile is typical of one possessing knowledge regarding whole language literacy instruction, but unable to translate this theory into practice. At each administration of the survey, high levels of concerns were evident in the three areas of "Self," "Task" and "Impact." Jackie's awareness of theory possibly influenced her high "Impact" concerns, while her inability to translate this theory into practice may have contributed to her high levels of concern in the areas of "Self" and "Task."

Jean's profile illustrates a teacher who is translating whole language theory into practice. "Self" and "Impact" concerns remained consistently high throughout all three administrations of the survey, whereas "Task" concerns alternately decreased and increased. Jean, a first year teacher, appeared to become increasingly comfortable with translating her theory into practice as her initial year of teaching progressed. However, increased concerns, evidenced in the August results of her survey, may have been due to her limited teaching experience. All concerns increased as she began her second year.

Change is best understood as it directly affects classroom practice, students and preparation time

According to Hord et al. (1987), "teachers, and others, will naturally relate to change or improvement in terms of what it will mean to them or how it will affect their current classroom

practice" (p. 45). Fannin teachers frequently raised issues regarding changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, as well as the preparation time involved in implementing whole language. University researchers worked with teachers through individual and small group conferences to alleviate these concerns. Doris, Jackie and Jean reflected on their concerns in the following journal excerpts:

> "I have found with The Velveteen Rabbit that I'm not covering the material in one week and I'm really not feeling guilty this week. We're going into the second week with the skills and with whole language, why should we cover one story in 3 days or one story in 1 week. No one says, I shouldn't have to. No one says you have to at all. See, that was one thing that I hesitated [about] because I felt like I was getting behind. It just takes too long...I think it's been hard for me to get away from the basal as far as leaving the skills. But, just this week, I've gone over with The Velveteen Rabbit and I've taken the skills from the basal and tried to use it in a way that came from The Velveteen Rabbit...in a different way than just a worksheet." (Doris, 3-90)
>
> "Last year was very chaotic and she (Jackie) tried to implement some whole language in her room without sufficient time to prepare or materials to use. The one glimmer of hope for her was that the students had

> really enjoyed the novels last year and that even if they had learned nothing else in the mess language arts had become, they found out that they liked to read and what books can be like." (Jackie, 8-90)
>
> "It (positive feedback from parents attending back to school open house) really made me feel good about teaching, because I was like, am I doing the wrong thing, am I really teaching them? (Jean, 2-90)
>
> The teachers from K-2 were very anxious, excited and eager to find out more about the whole language approach. But there was always the question, "Am I doing the right thing?" (Jean, 8-90)

Discussion

The "Whole Language Collaboration Project" was carefully designed to facilitate change in literacy instruction at Fannin Elementary School. Preliminary findings shared in these three representative cases demonstrate the individual nature of the change process. The cases were purposefully selected to represent the mid and endpoints along a continuum depicting individual philosophies toward literacy instruction. Other participants in this project would be interspersed throughout this continuum.

It is apparent that change is occurring at Fannin Elementary. The university researchers were aware of the importance of the following requisite behaviors in facilitating change: Committing time to the project, meeting individual needs

and building trust among participants. Time commitment required one and one half days per week in the school setting. During that time, university researchers made weekly classroom visits, were available for individual and small group consultation, and conducted weekly scheduled inservices.

Individual needs were addressed through spontaneous conversations in the hallways, in addition to scheduled conferences. Unscheduled conferences, lasting only several minutes, tended to address immediate classroom concerns. In contrast, scheduled conferences, of forty-five minutes to an hour, were more pedagogical in nature; teachers arrived with notebooks containing prepared questions. Access to the university researchers was facilitated by the time they spent on the Fannin campus.

Building trust among participants was the foundation of this change effort. Interactions with teachers were consciously planned to contribute to an ever-increasing level of trust. Teachers maintained control of: (a) their classrooms; (b) interactions with the university researchers, and; (c) continued participation in this project. Gradually, teachers came to accept the university researchers as part of the Fannin community.

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FIGURE 1

STAGES OF CONCERN PROFILES FOR CASE STUDY TEACHERS